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ABSTRACT

A study explored the effectiveness of a Word of the Month program and its effects on student behavior in a small independent elementary private school in San Francisco. Participants included all the people from this small elementary school with a student population of 82. Through the use of John Heidel and Marion Lyman-Mersereau's curriculum, students throughout the school were introduced to one word a month that exemplified positive characteristics that the school hoped would develop within the student population. Effectiveness of this program was assessed through interviews with faculty from the school. The assessments looked for behavior changes in the students in relation to the words that were presented, such as "respect," and "responsibility." It was hypothesized that the Word of the Month would have a positive effect in developing respectful and responsible behavior. Most teachers reported increases of "respectful" and "responsible" behavior after the implementation of the program. The teachers reported that they hoped the program would continue. Contains 22 references, and an appendix containing teachers' responses. (BT)

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The Effects of a Word of the Month Program On a Small Independent School

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Dominican College

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By
Peter Lavaroni

San Rafael, California
May 1999

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Abstract

This paper explores the effectiveness of a Word of the Month program and its effects on student behavior in a small independent school. Using Heidel and Lyman-Mersereay's curriculum, students throughout the school were introduced to one word a month that exemplifies positive characteristics that the school hoped would develop within the student population. Effectiveness of this program was assessed by interviews with the faculty from the school. These assessments looked for behavior changes in the students in relation to the words that were presented, "respect" and "responsibility". It was hypothesized that the Word of the Month would have a positive effect in developing respectful and responsible behavior. Most teachers reported increases of "respectful" and "responsible" behavior after the implementation of the program and felt the program was effective. All the teachers reported that they hoped the program would continue.

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Introduction

Open a newspaper on any given day and you will see stories about people that may disappoint you, worry you, and bother you. Stories that at one time may have scared you are becoming so common that they may not disturb you as they once did. We have a seemingly ever-increasing crime rate, with violent crime verifiably on the rise. We have people in politically powerful positions that are making personal decisions that are at the least questionable and possibly even dangerous for their own well being and the well being of our country. Actors and musicians are practically glorified for breaking the law or damaging themselves with drugs or alcohol. Some athletes use illegal steroids and questionable hormones to increase their size and strength despite the inherent dangers associated with such behavior.

Why?

What created the societal problems we face today? Are our schools responsible for any of the problems? Is there anything that teachers and educators can do to stop these behaviors from happening? Can educators help turn our world around so it is safe to read a newspaper again without fear?

To be sure, schools are not responsible for the horrifying actions that have captured the headlines. However can they be absolved of all blame? What can schools do to positively influence the future of our children and our society? This paper will look at character education as one possible stopgap of the apparent downward spiral into which our society seems to be falling.

Statement of Problem

What are the effects of a character education program, specifically a Word of the Month program, on a small independent private school?

The purpose of this paper is to look at one form of character education, namely a Word of the Month, and assess its ability to improve the character of the students' behavior in our schools. The Word of the Month is also called the value of the month in other studies. The framework around which this project is designed is the idea of emphasizing a specific value each month. A word (value) is presented to the whole school community at the beginning of the month. Teachers can involve all students with discussing and understanding the value using the written curriculum given to them by the principal or the curriculum they designed for their own use.

Hypothesis 1.

The Word of the Month program contributes to an increase in positive student behaviors in social interactions as measured by teacher observation and anecdotal information.

Hypothesis 2.

The addition of the Word of the Month program will increase occurrences of student respect for each other, their teachers, their school and themselves, as well as, responsibility for themselves and others, as measured by teacher observation and anecdotal information.

Rationale

The word "character" is derived from the Greek word "to mark" or to "engrave" and is often associated with the writings of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Plato could well be viewed as the father of character education for he believed that children should be brought up in such a way that they would fall in love with virtue. He thought that stories were the key to sparking this desire.

Socrates, another Greek philosopher, defined education as helping students gain both knowledge and virtue, to become both smart and good. He devised a method for having his students learn and better understand their beliefs and values by asking them to state a belief they may hold true. He would then ask a progression of seemingly innocent questions that led the students to an end that was different from their original position. He made his students look at their choices and their beliefs, sometimes changing the truths they held prior to the lesson. Although this manipulation of his students thinking was not always for a positive change, Socrates did show that people can change the way they think and believe. (Elkind, Sweet 1997)

The American government is often referred to as the great experiment. The authors of the *Federalist Papers* knew the importance of the character of the people for the success of this experiment, noting that a democracy will need a higher degree of virtue in its citizens than any other form of government. Traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for individual worth and human dignity are essential to a democracy's well being.

In nineteenth century United States, character education was a staple of public education. William McGuffey published his McGuffey Readers. These readers were a mixture of children's stories, poetry, and Bible stories, designed to teach moral lessons while children were learning to read, write, and do arithmetic. During the time

the McGuffey readers were implemented, there was no question about the correctness of teaching proper behavior traits. As with Plato, education had two goals: to help people become smart and to become good.

Jean Piaget is among the first psychologists whose work remains directly relevant to contemporary theories of moral development. Piaget was an observer of human behavior. He started his study of child development by watching children from his native Switzerland play their games. He theorized that children learn by action, that, by interacting with their environment, children construct and reconstruct their world. Based on his observations of children playing their games, Piaget theorized that moral development also should be considered a developmental process.

During one observation, Piaget noted, while playing a game of marbles, that some of the children wanted to make the circle larger, making the game more difficult for all players. A ten-year-old boy said, "It isn't a rule! It's a wrong rule because it's outside of the rules. A fair rule is one that is in the game." This boy believed in the absolute and intrinsic truth of the rules, characteristic of early moral reasoning. In contrast a girl aged thirteen, illustrated an understanding of the reasoning behind the application of rules, characteristic of later moral thinking. When asked to consider the fairness of the made-up rule compared to the traditional rule, the girl replied, "It is just as fair because the marbles are far apart," (making the game equally difficult for all players).

Using these kinds of observations, Piaget found that younger children think in a "heteronomous" stage of moral reasoning, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and duties, and obedience to authority. When he interviewed children about lying, young children would often reply that the act of lying was using naughty words. Younger children also couldn't understand that lying affected other people.

In his observations of older children, Piaget found that older children understood that telling lies effects other people. Older children are also able to understand that lies

are intentional and mistakes are not. With this knowledge, older children are better able to understand that lying and mistakes should be treated differently because of the intentions behind the act. Younger children tend to believe that wrong is wrong and all wrongs should be punished as such, no matter the intention.

Piaget believed that young children's heteronomous thinking results from two factors. The first is the egocentric style a younger child uses cognitively. Piaget found that young children are not able to take in and understand somebody else's view along with their own perspective and thus become very egocentric thinkers. This egocentricity means that young children are not able to put themselves into other people's shoes. Since they are unable to fully understand empathy, they are more concerned about the outcome of actions than the intentions that lead up to the act. This style of thinking Piaget termed "moral realism." Moral realism is also associated with the young child's belief in "imminent justice." This is the expectation that punishments automatically follow acts of wrongdoing, no matter what the intent of the act.

The second major contributor to heteronomous moral thinking in young children is their relative social relationship with adults. In the natural relationship between adults and children, power is handed down from above. The relative powerlessness of young children, coupled with childhood egocentrism feeds into a heteronomous moral orientation.

Children who play games with one another will find that this heteronomous thinking becomes difficult, for if all the players in a game think that the world revolves around them, the game will ultimately end in failure. As children play more, they eventually start to consider what caused this failure and develop a different style of reasoning. This more autonomous reasoning is characterized by the ability to consider rules critically, and selectively apply these rules based on a goal of mutual respect and cooperation. Thus, Piaget viewed moral development as the result of interpersonal interactions through which individuals work out resolutions which all deem fair. The

desire to become socially successful and fair leads to more consistent behavior than the heteronomous reasoning they earlier displayed.

Piaget reasoned that schools must offer children a chance to play and develop their social skills. He believed that schools should work out ways for children to discuss rules and to let the children work out rules that are fair for all players. Schools can help develop reasoning in children by providing students with opportunities for personal discovery through problem solving, rather than just telling them the rules. Schools allowing children to work out their own rules, have children that better understand the intent and the importance of rules. The power is no longer handed down from the adults above, but developed by the children themselves. This practice aids the heteronomous thinker develop into an autonomous thinker.

Since the 1970's, Lawrence Kohlberg's approach to moral development has gained strong support among many educators and researchers. Kohlberg believed, as did Piaget, that most moral development occurs through social interaction. His approach is based on the belief that individuals develop as a result of cognitive conflicts at their current stage. Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment beyond those ages studied by Piaget and determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget proposed.

Starting in the 1950's, Kohlberg, who at that time was a doctoral student from the University of Chicago and later taught at Harvard University, executed a twenty year study in which he followed 58 male subjects, ages 10, 13 and 16, to ascertain their moral beliefs and the reasoning that was used to defend their beliefs. (Many studies, most notably Carol Giligan, have discounted some of Kohlberg's findings and rationalizations because of the fact that Kohlberg used only male subjects in his study. She believes that the findings would be very different if female subjects were used and has shown this to be true with her own studies.)

Moral dilemmas were the tools in which Kohlberg probed the moral reasoning of the subjects. The following is an actual example of a moral dilemma Kohlberg presented.

"In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what it cost for him to make it. He paid two hundred dollars for the radium and charged two thousand dollars for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could get together only one thousand dollars, which was only half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper to him or let him pay the full amount later. But the druggist said, "No Heinz, I discovered the drug and I am going to make money from it." Heinz got desperate and broke into the druggist's store to steal the drug for his wife."

"Should Heinz have done that? Was it right or wrong? Why?"

As Kohlberg interviewed his subjects, he was less concerned about what the person thought was right than why he thought it was right. Kohlberg listened more closely to the way his subjects got to their answer than to the answers themselves. Kohlberg believed that people could come up with two different answers, but still be on the same reasoning level as one another. Conversely, two people could believe in the same answer, but used very different reasoning, which would show that they were at very different levels in moral development.

Kohlberg's findings were that people have five different levels of moral development. All people go through the same stages of moral reasoning, but some go faster, and some go farther. To a large degree, what determines how fast and how far they go in developing higher moral reasoning levels is their moral environment. An

important part of that environment is the moral dialogue-interaction around moral questions, especially with people at higher stages of moral development.

Kohlberg's five stages of moral development follow in order:

Stage One: Avoidance of Punishment: "Will I Get In Trouble?" At this level, people will reason to act a certain way to stay out of trouble. People will avoid breaking rules that are backed by punishment. This is the lowest form of moral reasoning. As with Piaget's framework, this can be explained by the egocentric views of the child, which is the inability to consider the thoughts and feelings of others.

Stage 2: Tit for Tat Fairness. "What's in it for me?" is the question that is likely to be asked by a stage two thinker. Reciprocity becomes the modality of thought. A stage two thinker will likely try to make things fair and even by hitting back.

Stage 3: Interpersonal Loyalty. It is in this stage that people think, "What will people close to me think of me?" Friends and family's view of the individual in stage three thought drives the individual to think and act.

Stage 4: Concern for Societal Consequences. In this stage people may ask the question, "What if everybody did it?" There is a recognition that society must have laws and people must obey them for the society to exist and thrive. People in stage four are more concerned about the norms and laws of society at large than the stage 3 thinker.

Stage 5: Respect the Rights of Every Person: This highest form of reasoning is the level that sees the laws of a society as necessary to protect the rights of all people. This last level of thought shows the ability of people to think about fairness for all people.

According to Kohlberg, there may be a theoretical sixth stage that is barely attainable and has been reached by just a very few people in history including Christ, Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Kohlberg himself. This stage is usually not

included in most research since it is so theoretical and therefore difficult to see and study.

Kohlberg believed that children need to go through each stage before they go to the next; there is no skipping a stage. A child exhibiting stage one thinking must go through stage two thinking before he becomes a stage three thinker. These stages are not age specific, and not everyone gets to stage five or stage four. Kohlberg found that it is possible for people to attain a higher developmental stage and then slip back to lower levels of reasoning, so once a person has attained a higher level of reasoning, there is no guarantee that he or she will remain there. Kohlberg also noted that people can exhibit different stages of reasoning at the same time.

One of Kohlberg's doctoral students, Moshe Blatt, thought that the moral dilemmas that Kohlberg used in his research could be used to stimulate moral discussion in the classroom. Blatt found that discussion over a period of several weeks, if directed by a teacher who posed or drew out higher stage arguments, helped students advance in their moral reasoning.

Kohlberg later found that he and his colleagues were able to bring stage differences in classrooms in 20 different schools. But within each school, there were some experimental classrooms that produced stage gains and some classrooms that did not. He was curious about what was different in classrooms where stage differences occurred and where they did not. Kohlberg's analysis showed that three things had to occur in the classroom for this moral reasoning progress to occur:

1. Controversial dilemmas that provoked disagreement among students.
2. Students at different stages of moral reasoning in the classroom.
3. The teacher use of the Socratic method which includes the "Why?" questions used by the teacher to have the students verbalize their feeling. (They found that this was the only teacher behavior on a one hundred-item teacher observation inventory that differentiated the classrooms that exhibited change from the classrooms that exhibited

no change.) The discussion approach is based on the insight that individuals develop as a result of cognitive conflicts at their current stage.

Kohlberg believed that the goal of moral education is to encourage individuals to develop to the next stage of moral reasoning. Kohlberg also believed, as did Piaget, that most moral development occurs through social interaction. Students need to operate as their own representatives to see what works and, maybe more importantly, what doesn't work for them socially and morally.

Kohlberg believed that schools need to be set up to allow students to interact with one another, to learn and grow from the interaction with each other. He believed that teachers need to play the crucial role of leadership within the community, without stifling the development of each student. He believed that teachers must play the part in the school of promoting the rules and norms that have a concern for justice and community. The teachers must ultimately enforce the rules, but at the same time allow the students the opportunity to work out their own social dilemmas.

Kohlberg and his associates developed the "just community" schools to match his beliefs of people's stages of moral development. These schools were designed to enhance students' moral development by offering them the chance to participate in a democratic community. Here, democracy refers to more than simply casting a vote. It entails full participation of community members in arriving at consensual rather than "majority rules" decision-making. One primary feature of these schools is their relatively small size aimed at providing the students with a sense of belonging to the group. These schools were designed to hold community meetings where issues related to the school and life surrounding the school were discussed and decided. When issues were voted upon, each member of the community got one equal vote, teachers and students alike.

Background and Needs

Dr. Thomas Lickona is a strong voice for the need of character education to be taught in schools today. He has written books and articles and taught classes on this subject for many years. He was past president of the Association for Moral Education and a former teacher of Education at Harvard University. He currently heads the Center for the teaching of the Fourth and Fifth R's and is Professor of Education at State University of New York at Cortland. Dr. Lickona has written three important books on the subject of character education, entitled *Moral Development and Behavior, Raising Good Children* and *Educating for Character.* It is this last book that I will focus on in this section.

Lickona states many very startling facts that show the unsettling changes in our social behavior over the last 30 years and that our children are changing in the same disheartening manner. These facts include the findings from *Age Specific Arrest rates and Race Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1990,* that violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and assault increased 53% by males and females from a time period from 1968 to 1988. Lickona also sites a study from *The Center for Health Sciences* which finds, among leading industrial nations, the United States has by far the highest murder rate for 15-24 year old males, seven times higher than Canada's, and 40 times higher than Japan's.

Lickona believes that moral education has declined from the 1960's to today for a number of reasons. Part of the problem is the mass media and the prominent place that it occupies in the lives of children. The typical elementary school child spends 30 hours a week in front of the television set. By age 16, the average child will have witnessed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence and by age 18, approximately 40,000

sexually titillating scenes. Episodes of sexualized violence are increasingly common as well.

Family has undeniable clout as a moral socializer of children. But families are changing. There has been a huge increase of single parent homes today and currently over 55 percent of these single parent homes are poor. For the first time in our history, more than half of all children under 18 have a mother in the work force. These trends represent significant changes that have effected society.

Parenting has changed since the 1960's. Studies have shown that parents are less involved with their children than they were before the 1960's and that parents are becoming poorer role models for the character development of their children. Lickona recognizes how difficult it has become to be an effective parent when other parents in the community are allowing their children a free run with little or no guidance.

Schools started teaching differently during the 1960's as well. Logical positivism had become popular in the 1950's. Logical positivism introduced the fundamental difference between "fact" and "value". Logical positivism stated that only real facts or truths could be scientifically proven. Moral or value statements by contrast, were considered emotive, expressions of feelings and not facts. Lickona writes that even a statement such as "Rape is wrong" was judged to be a personal sentiment rather than an objective truth. Morality was "privatized", made to seem purely a matter of private choice, not a matter of public debate.

The rise of "Personalism" in the 1960's changed society and eventually education. Personalism "held high the banner of human freedom and the value of the individual person...It emphasized rights more than responsibility, freedom more than commitment." People became less willing to work with the "establishment" and started doing "their own thing." Teaching morals became frowned upon.

Values clarification was the offshoot of "Personalism" for the schools. Values clarification told teachers not to teach values at all. Instead, the teacher's job was to

help students learn how to clarify their own values. It was believed that it was wrong to teach or even influence students about their "value positions". The popular book which came out in 1972 entitled *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* offered teachers 79 activities in which students discuss their feelings about certain issues. Teacher's were to allow students to discuss their feelings, but not to judge their responses.

Lickona believes that though there were some positive value issues raised for students, the discussions made no distinction between what the student wanted to do and what the student ought to do. Values clarification failed because it treated kids like grown-ups. It forgot that children and a lot of adults who are still moral children, need a good deal of help in developing sound values in the first place. Children were allowed to use their own less developed reasoning to decide what is best, without any guidance from their teachers.

Lickona sums up the case for values education today by listing the ten reasons for teaching values:

1. There is a clear and urgent need.
2. Transmitting values is and always will be the work of civilization.
3. The school's role as moral educator becomes even more vital at a time when millions of children get little moral teaching from their parents and when value-centered influences such as church or temple are also absent from their lives.
4. There is a common ethical ground in our society.
5. Democracies have a special need for moral education, because democracy is government by the people themselves.
6. There is no such thing as value-free education.
7. Moral questions are among the great questions facing both individuals and the human race.
8. There is broad-based, growing support for values education in the schools.

9. A commitment to moral education is essential if we are to attract and keep good teachers.

10. Values education is a doable job.

It is important for the school and its families to become essential partners to be totally successful for the character education of their students. Lickona writes, "Even if schools can improve students' conduct while they are in school and evidence shows that they can indeed do that, the likelihood of lasting impact on the character of a child is diminished if the school's values aren't supported at home...It used to be that if you were in trouble at school, you were in double trouble at home. Parents and teachers closed ranks. Now the parent is likely to be on the phone carrying on about their child's rights...When the schools and the parents work together these two formative social institutions have real power to raise up moral human beings and to elevate the morality of the nation".

It is important that the parents and the schools believe and agree in the necessity to teach values. Not everybody must agree, but a critical mass is necessary for success to occur.

Schools wishing to do values education need to be confident about two things: [1] There are objectively worthwhile, universally agreed upon values that schools can teach in a pluralistic society and [2] schools should not only expose students to these values but also help them understand, internalize, and act upon such values.

Lickona separates values into two different categories: moral values and nonmoral values. Moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness carry an obligation. We feel obligated to keep a promise, pay our bills, care for our children and be fair with our dealings with others. Nonmoral values carry no such obligation. For example, one may value time playing basketball and feel a need to play, but I have no moral obligation to get out on the court.

Lickona next breaks down moral values into two categories: universal and non universal. Universal moral values, such as treating all people justly and respecting their lives, liberty and equality, bind all people everywhere because they affirm our fundamental human worth and dignity. We have the right and the duty to insist that all people behave in accordance with these universal moral values. Non universal moral values do not carry a universal moral obligation. Duties specific to one's religion, such as fasting or going to church, may be a personal obligation, but not universal.

When schools and parents understand the differences between values, it is easy for all parties to see the importance of teaching universal morals to children and that all parties can agree on the values to be taught. The argument that values should not be taught does not hold truth when people understand the concept of universal morals.

Lickona believes that respect and responsibility are the two cornerstone of character education that moral values schools should teach and that these values are important cogs for healthy personal development, caring interpersonal relationships, a humane and democratic society, and a just and peaceful world.

He defines respect as showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It takes three major forms: respect for oneself, respect for other people and respect for all forms of life and the environment that sustains them. Respect is the restraining side of morality; it keeps us from hurting what we ought to value.

Responsibility is an extension of respect and the active side of morality. If we respect other people, we value them. If we value them, we feel a responsibility for their welfare. Responsibility includes taking care of oneself and others, fulfilling our obligations, contributing to our communities, alleviating suffering, and building a better world.

Other values that schools could teach include honesty, fairness, tolerance, self-discipline, helpfulness, compassion, cooperation and courage. Lickona points out that

these values are all related to his definitions of responsibility and respect in one way or another.

Although respect and responsibility are the backbone of character education to Lickona personally, he believes that it is important that the school, with its teachers, staff, students, and their families get together and decide which values to pursue. It is important that common ground is found so that all parties buy into the efforts of the teaching of these values. By allowing everyone to have a say in choosing the values that should be taught, there is a higher probability of success.

It is important that teachers treat students with love and respect. In this way students will feel safe to respond in kind. They are learning about the meaning of respect and love by experiencing them first hand. It is important that teachers do not humiliate the children but instead respect their concerns.

Teachers do need to teach directly to the subject matter. Though it is important to be a good role model, it is also necessary to discuss the importance of respect and responsibility. Teachers who teach values both directly and by example are more successful than those teaching just directly or just by example. If students do not experience the teacher as a person who respects and cares about them, they are not likely to be open to anything else that their teacher might wish to teach them about morals.

Teachers can combine good example and direct moral teaching by taking class time to discuss moral issues when they arise. Teachers should not be afraid to offer personal commentary that helps students understand why some behaviors, such as cheating and stealing, are wrong. Storytelling can be an effective way for teachers to teach values in a less direct fashion.

It is important for teachers to get to know each of his or her students. When the teacher gets to know a student as an individual, that student better responds to the advice of that teacher.

Three conditions are basic for creating a moral community in the classroom: [1] students know each other; [2] students respect, affirm, and care about each other; [3] students feel membership in and responsibility to the group.

Helping students get to know each other is the first step in building a moral community, because it is easier to value others and feel an attachment to them if we know something about them. Lickona offers many different activities to help the process such as partners and seating lottery.

After students know something about each other, it is easier for a teacher to develop the second aspect of moral community: student's respecting, affirming and caring about each other.

Teachers must stop cruelty in the classroom. Children that are different should not be picked on. Children's moral behavior can be changed by appealing to their minds and their hearts and prevention is preferable to cure.

One way to prevent peer abuse, establish norms of respect and kindness, and build self-esteem among students is to help develop habits of affirming each other. Teachers need to provide structured activities that make i.e. "safe" for students to say publicly something positive about a peer.

Teachers should develop a feeling of membership for all members in the class. Three things that contribute to this aspect of moral community: [1] the class has a group identity, [2] each individual student feels that he or she is a valued member of the group and [3] individuals feel responsible to and for the group.

Schools differ greatly in their moral culture. Lickona lists six elements that he believes are important in creating a school with a positive moral culture:

1. Moral and academic leadership from the principal. The principal articulates a vision of the school's goals and introduces all school staff to goals and strategies of the program. The principal must recruit support from parents and model the school's values through interactions with students, staff and parents.

Principals should institute a value of the month program schoolwide. The discussions and learning that happen in each and every classroom helps develop schoolwide attention and awareness to the value presented. This program gives the value a schoolwide consistency, which gives it a higher probability of success, i.e. more occurrences of examples of the value in the population of the school.

2. Schoolwide discipline that models, promotes and upholds the school values in all school environments. Clearly define the school rules and enforce them fairly. Handle discipline problems in a way that fosters moral growth.

3. A schoolwide sense of community. Get the whole school together and involved in the same activities. Get students to partake in extracurricular activities and uphold sportsmanship. Have everyone involved with jobs that contribute to the school.

4. Student government that involves students in democratic self-government and fosters care for their school.

5. A moral atmosphere of mutual respect, fairness and cooperation that pervades all relationships.

6. Elevating the importance of morality by spending school time on moral concerns.

Literature Review

The following literature review examines character education. The purpose of this literature review is to examine recent studies on or related to character education.

Importance of Character Education

Many researchers, such as Ankeney (1997) and Brooks (1997) report that there is a growing sense of urgency felt through society for the teaching of character education and values in our schools. Character Education is streaking back to the top of many education wish lists. In a recent survey of parents for US News and World Report, teaching children values and discipline ranked as the number one priority for education. Thomas (1991) sited many studies that state improving the conduct of American youth will help reverse the rise of a variety of social problems such as drug abuse, suicide, homicide and out of wedlock births along with improving student's achievement scores.

The National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Character Education (1996), approved the following conclusion in its report when writing of the importance and the necessity of teaching Character Education to students, "Social Studies teachers have a responsibility and a duty to refocus their classrooms on the teaching of character and civic virtue. They should not be timid or hesitant about working toward these goals. The fate of the American experiment in self-government depends in no small part on the store of civic virtue that resides in the American people. The social studies profession of this nation has a vital role to keeping this wellspring of civic virtue flowing."

It is this study's intention to formally introduce a Word of the Month program to a school that does not have a formal character education curriculum. We hope to learn if this is an effective program in character.

Implications of Character Education

Thomas (1991) cites many different studies that state Character Education programs assume that "a basic set of morals, values, and ethics has existed for a long time, is correct by virtue of its history and tradition, differentiates clearly between right and wrong, and is agreeable to all its stakeholders." Kohn (1997) questions if there can be a universal agreement on what constitutes good character, essentially asking what right do we have to say what characteristics should be taught. Etzioni (1993) finds that it is possible with high regularity. He cites as an example that 79% of all Americans, 86% of blacks, and 85% of Hispanics favor fair treatment for all, without prejudice or discrimination. Bernardo (1997) answered the question about whose values should be taught by asking his own question, "What parents don't want to instill in their children the virtues of honesty, goodwill, and patience?" He also says that schools, in collaboration with parents, have the responsibility to produce citizens of character, and that a common core of character traits were valued by families from diverse cultural backgrounds. The Dayton School district adopted the credo; "We will develop the character of each student with emphasis on appreciation of the common core of human values and respect for our common traditions of excellence." (1997)

For my study, it is believed that there are common character traits that should and could be taught at school. The characteristics that will be chosen and used as our Word of the Month will be characteristics that can be fostered and agreed upon by the faculty and the parents and are important for individual students to learn and develop for their own good and the good of their community.

Parent Involvement and Character Education

Essentially all the studies that correlated parent involvement with successful character education programs agree with Ryan and Bohlin (1997), Bernardo (1997), Berkowitz and Grych (1998), Berreth and Berman (1997) and Lickona (1993) that successful character education programs stressed the importance of communication with parents.

This study too believes that this needs to occur for it to succeed and will take extreme care to keep parents involved and informed.

Extrinsic Rewards and Character Education

There are differences of opinions in rewarding good behavioral traits with rewards. In the Dayton School studies, Bernardo (1997) found rewards were given to the students when good behavior was exhibited and felt the rewards were effective and important for the success of the program. Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (1997) state that character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation and not reward appropriate behavior with ribbons or trophies. Ryan and Bohlin (1997) agree with Lickona, et al, not to count on extrinsic rewards to cultivate virtues. "Character education is about inspiring students to do the good and interesting them in worthwhile pursuits both academic and extracurricular, and helping to internalize good habits."

This study presumes that extrinsic awards, other than praise, are not good for fostering and developing positive character traits for the long term. It is this study's belief that character must be developed intrinsically and that rewarding good behavior with extrinsic rewards may show positive findings early on, but will not develop the intrinsic rewards necessary for these behaviors to become permanent in each child. Therefore, rewards other than praise will not be doled out to the children.

Academic Success and Character Education

Much of the modern research of character education has been used to find correlations between children's social and academic worlds. Many of the studies have shown that they are more closely related than traditionally assumed. A study from Dayton, Ohio (Dayton Public Schools 1997) showed that not only did the student behavior improve when character education was introduced, but test scores rose dramatically as well. Parke, Harshman, Roberts, Flyr, O'Neill, Welsh, and Strand (1997) found that programs designed to enhance social skills and build academic readiness could evolve to ameliorate social and academic difficulties more effectively

than either studied independently. Lickona (1998) found that character education has a direct and positive relationship to high standards of academic responsibility.

This study of character education will be in effect for only two months and is too short a time to see if it carries any significant correlation with academic improvement, but it would be a very interesting study in the future.

Social Interaction and Character Education

Parker and Asher's (1987) findings demonstrated that children who have difficulty getting along with peers are at risk for later school adjustment problems. Problems can range from delinquency to criminality and other forms of social and emotional difficulties in adulthood. They also found that rejected children were found to be at risk for more long term learning problems than their non rejected peers. Schaeffer (1998) found that children who attend schools that instill character, develop a better sense of mutual respect, caring, and responsibility.

Curriculum in Character Education

Theme word programs have often been the centerpiece to many character education programs such as at the Prairie Star Elementary School (Elliott, 1998), the Ohio's Dayton Public Schools (Curriculum Review, 1998) and Allan Classical Traditional Academy (Bernado 1997). These theme word campaigns are centered around a list of laudable character traits and encourages students to discuss and learn about them. The faculty in each of these studies chose the monthly theme words. Teachers helped define the word, sited examples of the trait, and then led discussions centered around the word. All three of these studies found that the theme word programs were effective in developing positive character traits. All three studies were also surprised with the positive changes in other areas, including academics.

Development and Character Education

Mark B. Tappan (1998) uses Lev Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (34) and extends it to the domain of moral education using narrative and

story telling. He suggests that it is important to not only look at the actual developmental level of the student, but also the level of potential development. Berreth and Berman (1997) state that we need to structure all learning activities within a developmental context. What empathy and self-discipline mean to children changes with age, life stage and experience.

Methodology

This study adhered to the "The Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Human Research with Human Participants" in Research of the American Psychological Association (in 1982) APA Publication Manual, Fourth Edition, 1994.

For this study, a small independent elementary private school in San Francisco was chosen to implement a character education strategy, namely the Word of the Month. (This has been called value of the month in other studies.) The framework around which this project is designed is the idea of emphasizing a specific value each month by introducing the word (value) to all the classes.

Effectiveness of this program was assessed by interviews with the faculty from the school as well as my observations as the school principal. These assessments were looking for behavior changes in the students in relation to the words that were presented.

Participants

The participants in this study included all people from this small elementary private school with an entire student population is 82 students. There were six first graders (one boy and five girls), five second graders (four boys and one girl), ten third graders (six boys and four girls), sixteen fourth graders (nine boys and seven girls), fifteen fifth graders (eight boys and seven girls), fourteen sixth graders (seven boys and seven girls), nine seventh graders (six boys and three girls) and seven eighth graders (seven boys).

Most of the students come from homes with an average, to above average income. The school population is approximately fifty percent white, thirty five percent Asian, five percent black, and ten percent other. Thirty percent the students come from homes that speak no English, or use English as a second language.

There were six classroom teachers that were involved in implementing the Word of the Day program. There were four women classroom teachers and two men classroom teachers. The PE teachers were interviewed for their observations of the effectiveness of the Word of the Month program as well. There is one female PE teacher and one male PE teacher. Therefore eight teachers will be interviewed for their observations about any changes over this two month period of time.

Materials

The book used for this study is "Character Education Year 1, Grades 1-6", written by John Heidel and Marion Lyman-Mersereau, Incentive Publications, Inc. Nashville, Tennessee, Copyright 1999. The book states that "the purpose of this program is to design a structure whereby we can be more focused and intentional in our efforts to provide character education."

Procedures

Each word (value) of the month was chosen by the faculty two weeks before its introduction to the whole school community. The chosen word was a characteristic or action that the faculty would like to see instilled into the student body.

When a word becomes the Word of the Month, teachers will use it as a theme for discussions and assignments. The basic involvement for teachers would mean supporting and following the Word of the Month idea. At its most basic level, it would mean posting a sign bearing the current month's value and making the students aware of it with discussions and writings at the beginning of the month.

Teachers may choose to do more than the basic involvement and plan certain activities that exemplify the word. They may, for example, pick literature that shows examples of the Word of the Month. All staff members will be asked to look for the value behavior when it occurs at school and reward those occurrences with words of recognition. Teachers will not be asked to use extrinsic rewards to cultivate virtues.

Teachers will allow some of their weekly faculty meeting time to discuss, plan and review the program. Teachers will also allow some class time for discussion and writing assignments focused on the Word of the Month.

Since I am the principal I did not need to ask the administration for permission to implement this program. The following steps are the procedures I used to attain the permission of the school, its teachers, its families and its students to implement the Word of the Month

First, I wrote the following proposal:

"The Word of the Month will be a characteristic that the School's community thinks important to discuss and instill in their students. Some words that could be used this year, starting in January are included below:

honesty	diversity
respect	democracy
self control	compassion
commitment	community
responsibility	patience
moral courage	generosity
cooperation	self discipline

The school will choose one word a month. The principal will introduce the Word of the Month to each and every class. All students will be assigned at least one writing assignment a month using the Word of the Month as a theme. Teachers will discuss the special words in class with their students. Stories may be read that provide examples of what the word means to people. Teachers will be asked to look for the good behaviors as they are being exhibited and acknowledge those behaviors. By focusing attention to the good behaviors that constitute people with good character, the school hopes that these behaviors occur more often and more automatically."

After writing this proposal, I gave each of the six full time teachers, the two PE teachers, the Spanish teacher and the school's administrative assistant a copy of the proposal and asked them to pre-read this proposal before the next faculty meeting, one week from the delivery of the proposal.

At that next teachers' meeting, I invited input from the teachers and opened the floor for a discussion. All six classroom teachers said that they were willing to try to implement it into their curriculum and some expressed hope that it would be helpful. The administrative assistant agreed to post any news relating to this program in the school newspaper so that families would be informed.

Next I mailed the proposal to the every member of the school's Educational Advisory Committee (EAC) along with a cover letter explaining the need to discuss this new idea for the school. The EAC is made up of eight parents, two classroom teachers and the school principal. Each of the classrooms is represented by at least one parent.

The EAC met and discussed the Word of the Month proposal. They enthusiastically passed the proposal.

The school's weekly newspaper given to every family in the school published the results of the EAC. The parents at the Parents Association meeting held one week later also discussed the results of the EAC. There were no objections to the proposal raised by anyone associated with the school including parents, students, teachers, or employees of the school.

The written proposal was followed for the two months the program was studied. I did introduce the words respect and responsibility to each and every class for both months. The classroom teachers did discuss and assign at least one written assignment using the Word of the Month as a theme. The Heidel and Lyman-Mersereau Word of the Month curriculum was made available for each classroom teacher. Teachers used the Friday faculty meetings to discuss the program and exchange ideas that they found useful.

Two months after its implantation into the school, I presented each teacher with the following questions designed to evaluate their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Word of the Month program using the following questions:

1. Do you think the Word of the Month program was an effective program? Explain your answer.

2. What change in students' attitudes and behaviors do you attribute to the program?

3. What did you dislike about the program?

4. What did you like about the program?

5. Would you like to see the program continued or discontinued? Please explain your answer.

6. Approximately, how much class time did you spend each week for the Word of the Month?

7. How would you rate the quality of class time you spent for the Word of the Month?

Very wasteful

Somewhat wasteful

Somewhat worthwhile

Very Worthwhile

Please explain your answer.

Results

This result section reports on the responses to the questions asked to all of the teachers. The data was gathered from all respondents individually and recorded. The recorded responses can be found in Appendix A.

Responses to question 1. Do you think the Word of the Month program was an effective program? Explain your answer.

When looking at the responses for question one, it is clear that most of the teachers thought that the program was effective with six of the teachers responding that the program was indeed effective. All six of these teachers noted that it brought an awareness of what respect and responsibility are to the students of the school and many reported that they liked that it did this.

Two of the teachers responded that they were not sure about the effectiveness of the program. The seventh and eighth grade teacher wondered what the goals were for the program, apparently feeling that he could not assess the program without knowledge of the programs stated goals. This teacher did go on to say "it did provide a basis for discussion of desirable behaviors, as the pretext for discussing these doesn't often arise on its own." The middle school PE teacher noted positive changes in the behavior of the students, but wondered how much could be attributed to the program. He did report that the he believed that they (the fifth through eighth grade students) have been more respectful to me and each other this year as compared to recent years.

Particularly noteworthy is that none of the respondents reported that the program was ineffective.

Responses to question 2. What change in students' attitudes and behaviors do you attribute to the program?

All of the teachers responded that they saw at least some positive changes in attitudes and behaviors with their students. Six of the teachers noted that students showed more respect and responsibility or at least used the words respect and responsibility more often than before the program started.

The primary grade teacher and the third grade teacher noted some similar negative changes attributable to the Word of the Month. The primary grade teacher pointed out that when the students were introduced to the Word of the Month, some used the word incorrectly and some became ultra-sensitive when the word was used about them. The third grade teacher expressed that some students in her class had some difficulty understanding the word respect and how it should and could be used. It is worthwhile to note however that by the end of the month, students from both classes did seem to understand and use the words more accurately.

Three of the teachers noted that the short-term effect was positive but wondered how long the positive effects would last.

Responses to question 3. What did you dislike about the program? What did you like about the program?

Six of the eight respondents had no dislikes about the program. The teachers for the middle school P.E. teacher and the seventh and eighth grade teacher were the only respondents that reported any dislikes about the program. The seventh and eighth grade teacher reported that he found it difficult to discuss the words respect and responsibility without sounding corny. The middle school PE teacher responded that he would have like more involvement in the program.

Responses to question 4. What did you like about the program?

All of the teachers were able to find things that they liked about the program. Most of the teachers responded that they liked the way the whole school was focused on the same curriculum at the same time. Most of the respondents mentioned that they liked the changes that they saw in the students from their classes and the students throughout the school. Most of the teachers found that the words respect and responsibility were used more often after the implementation of the program.

Responses to question 5. Would you like to see the program continued or discontinued? Please explain your answer.

All eight respondents believed that the program should continue, with most of them stating that they hoped that it would.

Responses to question 6. Approximately, how much class time did you spend each week for the Word of the Month?

In reviewing the responses the time range went from a low to no time in class (upper grade PE) to a high of about an hour a week.

Responses to question 7. How would you rate the quality of class time you spent for the Word of the Month? Very wasteful, Somewhat wasteful, Somewhat worthwhile,Very Worthwhile.

Four of the respondents thought the time spent on the Word of the Month was very worthwhile. Four of the respondents thought the time was somewhat worthwhile. None of the respondents thought it to be somewhat wasteful or very wasteful use of time.

Discussion

While reporting and assessing the teachers' responses to this study's questions and relating them to my first hypothesis that predicted that the Word of the Month program would contribute to an increase in positive student behaviors in social interactions, it appears that this hypothesis was accurate in its forecast.

All the teachers reported that they did notice some positive student behavior changes and all but one, the middle school PE teacher, attributed some of these positive changes directly to the implementation of the Word of the Month program. Many of the teachers reported that students started taking care of issues on their own instead of including a teacher. Also many of the teachers responded that students used the words respect and responsibility more often and more correctly after the program was implemented. The first and second grade teacher reported that it gave the students a point of reference allowing them to notice the behavior, recognize it, and finally adopt it to their life. The third grade teacher noted that, "The amount of good that I saw in relation to the amount of time that was necessary makes this a very effective program."

My second hypothesis stated that the addition of the Word of the Month program would increase occurrences of student respect for each other, their teachers, their school, and themselves, as well as, responsibility for themselves and others was also correct. The third grade teacher reported that, "In the third grade, the word that made the biggest difference was responsibility. I feel the kids in this grade want to take more responsibility for the things that they can. They took a lot of pride in seeing their growth in this area during this time. I saw kids attitudes change about homework and schoolwork."

The teachers and I did notice the words respect and responsibility among the students used much more often after the program was implemented. Students throughout the school seemed to use the words more often than at any time prior to the

implementation of the program. The primary teacher liked the way the children used respect and responsibility in their vocabulary. She said, "I liked how most of the students used the words (values) in a positive way. They began to utilize them when resolving conflicts and helping other children through challenges."

The third grade teacher explained why she believed this program not only increased the use of the words responsibility and respect, but how it increased children's understanding of these concepts as well. She said, "It was giving a name to different elements of character and once the children identified them they understood them more. To me it's like learning music. You listen to a song that you like and it is nice, you like it but you don't know why. But when you start studying music you start learning about harmonies, tones and rhythms you get a better understanding about what it is that makes the music work so well. I felt that this was, in a way, what this did for character. It made the younger kids not only look at who is nice, but also what makes them nice. They started to think about what they do, and how this affects the way people look at them.

The teachers did notice that school wide Nirvana was not achieved through this program. The sixth grade teacher expressed that the program was very effective, but was not a miracle worker. She cited that there were incidents of students showing a lack of respect and responsibility during the two months of the study. The third grader teacher reported that her class was initially very confused with the word respect. They thought that if somebody didn't go along with their ideas that they were not being respected, even if the person that didn't want to go along was correct. (She noted that it did get better later in the program).

In general the teachers were very pleased with the program. The two teachers that responded with the least positive responses about the program were the seventh and eighth grade teacher and the middle school PE teacher and there may be two significant reasons for this. The first difficulty for them certainly, as noted by the

seventh and eighth grade teacher in question 3, must be that it is sometimes difficult to discuss positive value-laden characteristics in a junior high classroom without sounding "corny. Seventh and eighth grade students perceive themselves as being somewhat above this sort of thing." The second difficulty is that the curriculum taken from Heidel and Lyman-Mersereau states that it was written for grade levels K-6. Because the direct style that this Word of the Month is designed to use and because the actual curriculum was written for younger students, the teachers may be correct in their assessment that this may be a difficult curriculum to teach to this population of students.

Despite these problems, the seventh and eighth grade teacher was willing to continue the program and attributed many positive changes to his class because of the program. Even the middle school PE teacher admitted that he liked that he heard kids talk about being respectful more this year than in years past. He believed that kids actually treated one another with more respect as well.

An important element that many of the teachers in this study seemed to appreciate was the opportunity to discuss respect and responsibility in a positive forum. Essentially, before the program was in place, teachers talked about respect and responsibility only when the students did not exhibit these traits and were in trouble or were creating problems for themselves and for the school. By presenting them as part of the daily curriculum, teachers were happy that they were able to discuss these behaviors in a positive and planned way and not just reacting to negative behavior. The sixth grade teacher said, "I think this was an effective program as it encouraged me to address such issues as respect and responsibility in an open, relaxed discussion format rather than in a berating lecture after the fact. By this I mean that too often such topics are brought up after someone has done something wrong, in a sense, as a way of shaking a finger at the offenders. At such times we speak more of *disrespect* and *irresponsibility,* unintentionally focusing on the negative behavior rather than emphasizing the positive behavior desired. This program gave me an opportunity to

really focus on acknowledging and praising students when they did show respect, responsibility, and wisdom in making decisions."

As I cited in the Background and Needs section of this study, I pointed out that according to Thomas Lickona there are six elements that are important in creating a school with a positive moral culture.

"The first element is that moral and academic leadership starts with the principal. The principal articulates a vision of the school's goals and introduces all school staff to goals and strategies of the program...Principals should institute a value of the month program schoolwide. The discussions and learning that happens in each and every classroom helps develop school wide attention and awareness to the value presented. This program gives the value a school wide consistency, which gives it a higher probability of success, i.e. more occurrences of examples of the value in the population of the school."

I assumed my role as principal was going be an important cog in the wheel of a successful Word of the Month program, so I took my role seriously. I did go to each and every classroom and discussed the Word of the Month and I stressed how important I believed it was. Many of the teachers responded that my visits were important and beneficial for the success of the program. The primary classroom teacher reported that her class spent one morning each month (about 30 to 45 minutes) with me when I would come to her class and discuss the Word of the Month. "Mr. L's visits made the Word of the Month more special and official and at the same time more universal. It made the connection seem more apparent between the classroom and the whole school." The fifth grade teacher responded, "I liked when <u>you</u> (the principal) introduced the 'Word of the Month' at the beginning of the month. It made it seem that much more important." The eighth grade teacher agreed. He said, "Being reminded by the administration to work with the group on these concepts was worthwhile, even if difficult."

By having the principal introduce the Word of the Month to each and every class, the second element that Lickona noted to be important for a moral school was automatically applied. Lickona wrote that "a school needs a school wide discipline that models, promotes, and upholds the school values." By having the principal discuss the Word of the Month with each class, it automatically becomes schoolwide and important.

The third grade teacher found that the whole school involvement in the word for the day program was an important element for her class. She explained this by saying, "Not only did I like the changes that I saw, I also appreciated how the program brought the whole school together in all grades. The third grade was excited to study about the same things that the older students were studying and they were excited about writing and publishing their works with the older students that they admired."

Some of the teachers responded that they wanted more focused whole school involvement with the Word of the Month program. The primary classroom aide said, "When we had a specific project and activity the Word of the Month was worthwhile. The "caught being respectful" notes were worthwhile activities. The "egg baby-sitting" activity was a great activity for responsibility. I think this program shows a lot of school unity. The words in the entrance of the school and up in each classroom ties the school together in a positive way. Maybe the classes could come up with projects for or in the community (at Rochambeau Park for example). It would be worthwhile for the students. This could also be a full school activity, writing contest, or skits, maybe acting out Aesop's Fables or other short stories...The program should continue next year with a little more support about how to incorporate the words into classroom and the follow up activities."

The fourth grade teacher answered differently because he liked the Word of the Month program just the way it was. "I would like to see the program continued in this same manner of letting the teachers decide how best to use it. I do think, though, that

it's very important to not over-do the program. Even with universally accepted values, if there's too much push onto the students, it could start sounding preachy."

The third grade teacher enjoyed the flexibility that the program gave her to teach the words without over extending her class and personal time. She said, "I was able to blend it into my existing curriculum so easily. Most of the time we just worked it into what we were studying. I seldom, other than the times you came to talk about the word directly, spent time devoted just to the Word of the Month."

Conclusion

As stated in this study's Literature Review, many people have thought it is wrong for schools to teach values to children. As with Alfie Kohn (1997), they may believe that people's values are personal and that you cannot and should not choose values to teach children. Strict followers of Kholberg or Piaget may believe that teaching values directly may actually be slowing moral development. I was certainly prepared to find that this study's design to teach values directly would face some resistance. I wasn't sure if the resistance would be great, but I was sure it would face at least some.

I must say that I was moderately surprised and pleased by the very positive responses that the teachers gave to this study's questions. However, what surprised me more was the total lack of negative reactions to the program all the way through this study from all parties involved with the project including the teachers, the students and the families. Although I was prepared to defend this study of character education and this Word of the Month program, I never once had to do so. Not one question or complaint was ever raised to me.

There may be many reasons for this. I can think of three I believe to be true.

I believe that the first reason is my choice for the name of the program. As I have written throughout the paper, the Word of the Month program may be called the Value of the Month program in other studies. I purposely made the choice early on not to call it the Value of the Month because the name may have triggered some resistance and concern that the Word of the Month title would not. It is important to note that I never hid what we were studying or doing with any of the parties involved, and in fact was quite clear and honest to all the parties about what we were doing throughout the implementation of the study (note Procedures). However, by not using the word

"values" in the title of the program, there may have been less of the concern that other studies have faced using the word "values" in its title. It might be interesting to reproduce this same study changing nothing but the name from Word of the Month to Value of the Month to see if the results are similar and if there would have been more questions raised from the participants.

The second reason is that I did my best to help guide the study so that the words that were used were the universal moral values of respect and responsibility, (see Thomas Lickona in this study's Literature review) By choosing the words respect and responsibility, I felt the study was more easily accepted by the entire population of the school. It is certainly possible that some of the other words that are suggested by the Character Education curriculum that Heidel and Lyman-Mersereau developed, such as faith, may have met with more resistance. This too might be an interesting study for the future, intentionally choosing words that may be a bit more emotionally charged and in theory face some resistance and then comparing those results to this study.

The third reason this program was so well accepted is that people are now ready for values to be taught again in schools. As I discussed the study with the school's parents and teachers, it was apparent to me that they were pleased that something was being done that directly taught and discussed values in a formal way in our school. Parents and teachers were not only non-resistant to the idea that values were being discussed, they were openly pleased that the school was addressing character education. All of the teachers responded that they were pleased to have had the opportunity to discuss respect and responsibility in the classroom with the students. The fact that all of the teachers responded that they wanted to continue this Word of the Month program indicates to me, that they believe that it is a worthwhile program for them, for their students, for their student's families, and for the school.

As I stated in my Literature Review, I believed that there are common character traits that should and could be taught in a direct manner in schools and after

reviewing this study it feels that the teachers agree with me. The third grade teacher said, "I think too often we neglect the growth of students as individuals who need not only a strong academic foundation to make it out there in the world, but also a strong sense of who they are, what their values are, and especially how they can look at the differences between themselves and their peers in a positive light!" The primary grades PE coach said, "Yes, I feel that the program was effective because the words were representative of core values we would like to foster in children. The fact that children heard the words and spoke about them in groups and with the teacher meant that these words were getting a good amount of attention. Simply introducing children to these ideas at school in a focused way is effective in my mind to helping children define their values."

Throughout the time I was researching the literature for this paper, I was searching for a Word of the Month program to emulate or use and I was unable to find one for the longest time. I was prepared to write my own curriculum when just before the start of the program in January 1999, I finally located the curriculum that Heidel and Lyman-Mersereau developed. This curriculum is copyrighted 1999. (It certainly is logical that this study has to be one of the first independent studies using this curriculum.) Since there is apparently so little curriculum like it on the market, I am sure that Heidel and Lyman-Mersereau certainly must have felt there was a need. I also assume that, like me, they believe that this is the time that people may be looking for this type of program. I doubt that they would have worked to develop curriculum that they believed no school or teacher would want to use.

As I noted in the Rationale section of this study, Lawrence Kohlberg believed that the goal of moral education was to encourage individuals to develop to their next stage of moral reasoning. He believed that this moral development occurs through social interaction and that students need to operate as their own representatives to see what works and what doesn't. Kohlberg believed that schools need to be set up to

allow students to interact with one another, to learn and grow from the interaction with each other. He believed that teachers need to play the crucial role of leadership within the community, without stifling the development of each student. He believed that teachers must play the part in the school of promoting the rules and norms that have a concern for justice and community. The teachers must ultimately enforce the rules, but at the same time allow the students the opportunity to work out their own social dilemmas.

As I was setting up this study and researching Lawrence Kohlberg, I assumed, and probably rightly so, that Kohlberg would have never used this or any Word of the Month program. I believe that he disliked any curriculum that directly taught respect and responsibility to students because it takes away the freedom of choosing and finding out what works on their own. His belief that students need to work differences out amongst themselves without a teacher butting in, in any way shape or form, was paramount to his belief in how students learn to reason and relate and therefore grow.

All of this made me think of one question I would have liked to have had the chance to ask Lawerence Kohlberg. "If there was a program in which students had already learned about responsibility and were applying the working out their differences on the playground and in class, using their own words and their own reasoning, and choosing not to get a teacher involved, then, wouldn't you be pleased with this program?" If the answer to this question would have been yes, then maybe Kohlberg would have liked the Word of the Month.

In reviewing this study, it can be noted that many of the teachers reported that students started taking the onus of dealing with social difficulties amongst themselves much more often after the Word of the Month program was initiated than before. The sixth grade teacher reported, "What I did see were several instances where individuals said something disrespectful and then stopped themselves and apologized before I had a chance to step in. I thought that a few individuals appeared better able to resolve their

arguments or hurt feelings on their own, and most have been more willing to come forward and talk to me about problems with their classmates."

There is some irony that the students newly found social independence that Kohlberg appreciated was apparently brought out and developed by the Word of the Month program, the same program that Kohlberg, in my estimation, would have disliked because it would stifle students social growth.

Why and how did this program help students develop a willingness to work out problems on their own may be an excellent question for future study. I would certainly hypothesize that the parameters that the program emphasized allowed the students to try out their words. By better understanding respect and responsibility, students were better able to express their desires to be treated fairly by their schoolmates. I would also hypothesize that by knowing that the school emphasized respect and responsibility, students may have felt safer to try to work things out on their own. Every student knew that every other student discussed the importance and the value of being respectful and responsible. Students may have felt that this was an environment that they could feel free to express their feelings and their wants without a fear of retribution.

Whatever the reason, I, along with the teachers felt that it was certainly a worthwhile program for our small independent school.

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Appendix

The following are the teachers' responses to the questions from the Methods section. Each teacher's response is recorded in full here. I compared and contrasted their responses in the Results and Discussion sections.

Primary Grades Teacher (First & Second)

1. I think the word for the day was very effective in the primary grade. It brought an awareness to the children's minds. They began to recognize each word in action and appreciate the values in both themselves and other students. It was not a word to discuss on one day and put aside the next. It became a part of our everyday social and academic interactions, a part of everyday life.

2. Positive changes in attitude and behavior: The words discussed gave the children a point of reference. It allowed them to notice the behavior, recognize it and to finally adapt it to their life.

Negative changes in attitude and behavior: When the words were first introduced, some students became extra sensitive and used the words as an excuse for unfairness. Some started looking for the opposite in those whom they wanted to tell on! (This happened only in the first month when the concept was very new.)

3. I didn't dislike anything about the program. It would be nice to get students involved somehow across grades while doing the character study.

4. I liked how most of the students used the words (values) in a positive way. They began to utilize them when resolving conflicts and helping other children through challenges.

5. I would like to see it continued because of the mentioned reasons.

6. We spent one morning each month (about 30 to 45 minutes) to introduce it, when our principal (The Lovely and Talented Mr. L) came to our class and discussed it. Then it became an interactive on-going process through out that month and the months that followed.

7. Somewhat worthwhile. Mr. L's visit made the Word of the Month more special and official at the same time more universal. It made the connection seem more apparent between the classroom and the whole school. I think when the word is introduced it is better to almost never introduce any examples of the opposite value (disrespect, or irresponsible). These examples are often taken by (some, not all) children as situations to try out, and/or they use them inappropriately. If the situation should take place naturally, then it can be discussed and even used as an example in the course of the character study.

Third Grade Teacher

1. Yes, because it gave teachers a reason to look for elements in character education while working with their day to day curriculum and how easy it was to bring out those elements while teaching. It was giving a name to different elements of character and once the children identified them they understood them more. To me it's like learning music. You listen to a song that you like and it is nice, you like it but you don't know why. But when you start studying music you start learning about harmonies, tones, and rhythms you get a better understanding about what it is that makes the music work so well. I felt that this was, in a way, what this did for character. It made the younger kids look at who is nice but also what makes them nice. They started to think about what they do and how this effects the way people look at them.

2. In the third grade, the word that made the biggest difference was responsibility. I feel the kids in this grade want to take more responsibility for the things that they can. They took a lot of pride in seeing their growth in this area during this time. I saw kids attitudes change about homework and schoolwork.

The third graders were most confused with the word respect. They thought that if somebody didn't go along with their ideas that they were not being respected, even if the person that didn't want to go along was correct.

3. Nothing.

4. Not only did I like the changes that I saw, I also appreciated how the program brought the whole school together in all grades. The third grade was excited to study about the same things that the older students were studying and they were excited about writing and publishing their works with the older students that they admired.

5. Continued. Definitely.

6. It is difficult to say because I was able to blend it into my existing curriculum so easily. Most of the time we just worked it into what we were studying. I seldom, other

than the times you came to talk about the word directly, spent time devoted just to the Word of the Month.

7. Extremely worthwhile. The amount of good that I saw in relation to the amount of time that was spent makes this a very effective program.

Fourth Grade Teacher

1. Yes, I thought the program was effective. There are many ways that The Word of the Month program could be used in a classroom. We in the 4th grade have just scratched the surface of possibilities. Following the writing assignments and discussions that we did have each month, the kids were heard referring to the words in various situations which means they were thinking about them.

2. I think that the program has definite potential, but it's too early to see any real changes in attitudes and behaviors at this time.

3. I have no dislikes about the program mostly because there were no requirements as to how the program should be used in the classroom.

4. I do think it's important to instill or, at least, reinforce and support universal values. I like the fact that we teachers can decide how best to use the program in our classes. I can see many possible ways. Having words featured each month this way lends itself very well to having great discussions in many areas.

5. I would like to see the program continued in this same manner of letting the teachers decide how best to use it. I do think, though, that it's very important to not over-do the program. Even with universally accepted values, if there's too much push onto the students, it could start sounding preachy.

6. In the 4th grade class, so far, only a short writing assignment and a discussion have been initiated each month. As the program continues, I hope to add other activities and see how the students respond.

7. The time spent, so far, has been extremely worthwhile. I think it's very important.

Fifth Grade Teacher

1. I think the program has been effective for these reasons: I think the kids like the idea of having this program to buy into. They were very eager to know what the new Word of the Month would be. I heard the words come up in the kids' conversations from time to time when trying to resolve conflicts with their friends. It is hard to know the long-term benefits at this point in time, but I do believe it can only strengthen the children's values.

2. I do see some students being more respectful and taking more responsibility for their actions. It will be interesting to see the long-term effects.

3. There is nothing to dislike about the program. I hope it isn't over. It only fosters better values and better, more meaningful relationships.

4. At the beginning of the year I started with a "values clarification " unit and have always been a firm believer that schools need to assist the families in instilling good values in the children. This program only reinforces this and it is great when the messages come from the school as well as the teacher. I liked when you introduced the 'Word of the Month' at the beginning of the month. It made it seem that much more important.

The packet you gave the teachers for "wisdom" was great and the kids really enjoyed the fables. I would appreciate some background information and some ideas for activities for each word if at all possible.

5. I definitely would like to see it continued. I think the students would like it too. I think it would seem like it wasn't important if the school dropped it.

6. It's hard to really know. Most of the time, it wasn't a formal lesson. When the opportunity arose, we discussed how the Word of the Month could help the child remember how he/she could practice that behavior. Each month I had one writing assignment specifically devoted to that word (about two class periods).

7a. Somewhat worthwhile. I would have said 'very worthwhile' but sometimes the writing assignments were met with some resistance from some of the students. (However this might have been related to the energy level at the time.)

Sixth Grade Teacher

1. I think this was an effective program as it encouraged me to address such issues as respect and responsibility in an open, relaxed discussion format rather than in a berating lecture after the fact. By this I mean that too often such topics are brought up after someone has done something wrong, in a sense as a way of shaking a finger at the offenders. At such times we speak more of *disrespect* and *irresponsibility,* unintentionally focusing on the negative behavior rather than emphasizing the positive behavior desired. This program gave me an opportunity to really focus on acknowledging and praising students when they did show respect, responsibility, and wisdom in making decisions.

2. Well, it's not a miracle worker! Some serious instances of disrespect and irresponsibility occurred in my classroom during the time we were discussing these words. The discussions, though full of insightful comments and thought provoking questions from the kids, did not magically wipe away those natural tendencies to joke around with each other and even say hurtful things at times that were not meant as a joke. What I did see were several instances where individuals said something disrespectful and then stopped themselves and apologized before I had a chance to step in. I thought that a few individuals appeared better able to resolve their arguments or hurt feelings on their own, and most have been more willing to come forward and talk to me about problems with their classmates. Many have also used some of the things we have discussed as the basis for poems and creative stories on their own. All of this shows that whether they show it every minute of every day in their actions, they are thinking about it .... that's a start!

3. I'm not just trying to be nice and it's not because I am tired of writing, but I can't think of anything! (I would give my students 0 credit for an answer like that!!)

4. It was a wonderful opportunity to have some great class discussions outside the realm of academics. I think the students (whether they admit it or not) got a lot out of hearing their peers' point of views on different issues - it allowed us all to learn a little more about each other and where everyone is coming from. I especially liked the packet on wisdom -- it gave me a great starting point from which I was able to quickly get ideas and branch out with some of my own -- very helpful!!

5. I would love to see it continue for all the positive reasons already stated!

6. I spent approximately an hour, maybe a little more some weeks depending on what we had going on.

7. Very worthwhile. Again, I think too often we neglect the growth of students as individuals who need not only a strong academic foundation to make it out there in the world, but also a strong sense of who they are, what their values are, and especially how they can look at the differences between themselves and their peers in a positive light!

Seventh-Eighth Grades Teacher

1. I'm not sure if the program was very effective or not, primarily because I'm not sure exactly what its goals were. I think it did provide a basis for discussion of desirable behaviors, as the pretext for discussing these doesn't often arise on its own.

2. I'm not sure I noticed any long-term changes in attitudes or behaviors, but in the short term I saw many differences. When someone exhibited a particularly good (or a particularly bad) behavior which had been discussed, simply pointing to the Word of the Month written in the upper corner of the board would relay the message to the student clearly. If the act had been appropriate, there was a noticeable (if fleeting) sense of pride. If the action was inappropriate, no more needed to be said. Due to past discussions, the message was clear.

3. Seventh and eighth graders perceive these value-laden terms as somewhat corny, and perceive themselves as being somewhat above this sort of thing. Finding the right time and method to introduce the terms in an acceptable context was not always easy at this level.

4. The values conveyed by the program are highly desirable- especially for the population I work with. Being reminded by the administration to work with the group on these concepts was worthwhile, even if difficult.

5. I'd like to see the program continued. I think it has some very good points to make, both to the student population and to their parents. I think it's important to remind those at home that these topics need to be discussed, and that they are not inherently understood by their children.

6. In truth, probably no more than 15 minutes per week. However, just having the word on the board for reference after the 15 minutes proved valuable.

7. Somewhat worthwhile. The response I got from my class was certainly not overwhelming, but it was a worthwhile endeavor, the time was certainly not wasted. I

can see the possibility that, as they get used to the idea of being presented with a new idea each month, that they will begin to accept the procedure more easily.

Primary PE Teacher

1. Yes, I feel that the program was effective because the words were representative of core values we would like to foster in children. The fact that children heard the words and spoke about them in groups and with the teacher meant that these words were getting a good amount of attention. Simply introducing children to these ideas at school in a focused way is effective in my mind to helping children define their values.

2. I overheard students using the words more in a day to day talk after the word was introduced. This would last for only a couple of days after the word was introduced. Also the primary class teacher and I used the word respect a lot to explain good behavior so I think it was encouraging for them to use it too. They basically used the words to monitor each other's behavior.

3. There are no dislikes.

4. The information that was passed on to the teachers was helpful. It acted as a good personal reminder. The wisdom article was interesting.

5. The program should continue next year with a little more support about how to incorporate the words into classroom and the follow up activities.

6. We talked about respect a couple of minutes a day and responsibility one full week of activities with the "egg baby-sitting" activity.

7. Somewhat worthwhile. When we had a specific project and activity the Word of the Month was worthwhile. The "caught being respectful" notes were worthwhile activities. The "egg baby-sitting activity" was a great activity for responsibility. I think this program shows a lot of school unity. The words in the entrance of the school and up in each classroom ties the school together in a positive way. Maybe the classes could come up with projects for or in the community (at Rochambeau Park for

example) it would be worthwhile for the students. This could also be a full school activity, writing contest, or skits, maybe acting out Aesop's Fables or other short stories.

Fifth-Eighth Grade PE Teacher

1 In short, I think it has had a positive effect but it is hard to for me to be quantitative about how much can be due to the program. While thinking about my relationships with the kids fifth through eight grades, I believe they have been more respectful to each other and me this year as compared to recent years. I believe that it has had a positive influence, but I can't prove it. I would have liked to have been in the class and been part of the discussions more.

2. Overall when this years seventh and eighth graders come out to the playground they are easier to work with than in years past. A lot of the stuff that I would often get outside I didn't get this year. It has been a much easier year with this group than in years past. I am not sure that if it is the class or the programs that we started. They certainly have showed more respect to me and to each other than any of the years past. The fifth grade is a much better group too.

3. If I was more aware of the program I would have been better able to answer the effectiveness of the program. Since I was seldom in the room when you made the presentation of the word, I feel that it would have been more effective for me to be part of the program more.

4. I like that I heard kids talk about being respectful more this year than in years past. I think I saw kids actually treat one another with more respect as well.

5. Continued. It is not a throw away thing.

6. We did not use any time out at PE class for the Word of the Month.

7. Since I didn't spend any PE class time on the Word of the Month, it is impossible to assess the quality of the time I didn't use. I did notice a positive difference with the student's behavior in my PE classes and at recesses too, so I believe the time used in the classes was very worthwhile.